

PSYSOC 2013

Pupils' Interpersonal Problems And Occupational Stress In Teacher. Preliminary Results.

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Abstract

This study investigates whether or not high school pupil's behaviour has any relevant impact as regards teachers occupational stress and therefore contributing to the burnout process with its already known risk factors. In 2008 Lopez, Santiago, Godás and colleagues after having investigated the influence of the pupils disruptive behaviour on teachers burnout – levels demonstrated that difficulties in conflict management and the absence of help in setting disciplinary measures represented reliable predictors for burnout. In our investigation we query, from a psychodynamic point of view, whether the pupils everyday inter relational behaviour, (considered a situation factor), has a transference impact on the teachers burnout. As would be expected dominant-hostile behaviour tends to accompany subjective valuation of teachers occupational stress.

Method: Secondary high school teachers and their pupils were assessed using the instruments mentioned below in order to calculate a relationship -score for each teacher based on the pupils questionnaires. The teachers were tested with the Brief Symptom Inventory, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Questionnaire on Life-Satisfaction and the Interpersonal Problems Inventory. Pupils were tested with an adapted version of the IIP for adolescents.

Results: Shows that even if pupils who have distant and detached behaviour are not associated with teachers stress related symptoms it is however associated with and leads to teachers' emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the intensification of the symptoms.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of PSYSOC 2013.

Keywords: interpersonal, accompany, pupils

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Introduction

Both burnout and occupational related pathological problems are a diffused phenomena nonetheless clinical psychology and psychiatry hasn't found a consensus on the definition of burnout. Not even a definition or operationalization of burnout can be found in the "International Classification of diseases" (ICD-10) chapter V(F), consequently burnout isn't even a mental disorder. Therefore studies dealing with burnout are overall theory-orientated and not defined in detail or experimented. In 1992 Christina Maslach gave a good definition of burnout by saying that it appears in three dimensions a) emotional exhaustion, b) depersonalization and c) personal accomplishment.

In Europe 25-35 percent of teachers suffer from "burnout". Lower levels were found in Italy only 20%. Apart from this 20 to 30 % of teachers had other stress-related somatic or mental disorders (Bauer, 2009). So what do professions such as educators, nurses, teachers, and social worker, with high burnout rates have in common? They are all characterized by interpersonal skills and where their tool is their personality. All these interpersonal skills are the beginning of a burnout process. In fact Buschmann and Gamsjäger (1999) said that ambivalences are difficult for teachers or social workers to handle. They are not only 'people of trust' but also they have a great responsibility and authority. It is they who decide if a person passes onto the next class or if someone gets the guardianship of a child or not. In fact it is when opposing poles as such mentioned, things get hard to handle and difficulties arise. Researchers have taken into account the explanation of burnout processes given by Hobfoll (1988) COR-theory ("conservation of resources"). He said that the point of occupational stress was how a person could cope with stress and what resources for coping with it are available as well as a variety of these resources. We tend to preserve what resources are available to us; such as personal characteristics, objects and even circumstances when threatened by daily hassle and overload. This loss has more of a negative impact on the person rather than an advantage because the COR-theory isn't a kind of homeostasis. In 2004 Buchwald and Hobfoll said burnout at work was caused by various losses of these resources. Burnout and its consequences are an already known factor but this study investigates whether or not secondary high school pupils every day behaviour has any relevant impact on teachers occupational stress and to the burnout process itself. Interpersonal pupil behaviour can be more of an over load and decrease teacher's resources rather than increase them. Research has shown that interpersonal pupil behaviour arise in accordance and develop psychic illnesses and their symptoms, hence bringing about teachers occupational stress. This study investigates, from a psychodynamic point of view, whether or not the pupils habitual behaviour has a transference impact on the teachers occupational stress. Will it be the case that whether dominant-cold or expected behaviour or caring-warm behaviour go hand in hand with the teacher's occupational stress in subjective valuation. These behavioural patterns are they considered as a loss of resources, exposing teachers to the burnout related symptoms?

Method

Secondary high school teachers and their pupils were assessed using the instruments mentioned below in order to calculate a relationship-score for each teacher based on the pupils questionnaires.

Interpersonal problems were operated with the "Inventory of interpersonal problem – IIP". The IIP is a pencil-and-paper-questionnaire based on Learys (1957) circumplex-model giving the possibility to describe interpersonal behaviour. This model was made up of two axis: the horizontal axis the so called affiliation-axis and the vertical the control-axis. The affiliations-axis catches the emotional characteristics of interpersonal behaviour and the control axis shows how much and what kind of control a person carries in a relationship. The secondary school teachers were tested with the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Franke, 2000), the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Büssing & Perrar, 1992), the Questionnaire on Life-Satisfaction (FLZ-M; Henrich & Herschbach, 2000) and the Interpersonal Problems Inventory (IIP; Horowitz, Strauß & Korby, 2000). The pupils were tested with an adapted version of the IIP for adolescents.

Results

757 pupils and 71 teachers were assessed from two secondary high schools in South Tyrol in the north of Italy. 247 female and 347 males are pupils, 35 female and 36 male teachers. Pupils were on average 16 (SD=1,76) years old and their teachers 40,63 (SD=9,84). Seeing as the work is still in progress we will point out what has arisen so far regarding emotional negative behaviour: pupils interpersonal problems: 12,7 % above average are vindictive/ego centric, 12,1 % cold and distant, 17,1 % intrusive and demanding. There were no abnormalities concerning the teachers' symptoms, only some significant primarily unassertive results in teachers' behaviour in relationships. The shifting interpersonal relationships between the pupils and the teachers symptoms are calculated and the data have

shown no significant correlation between teachers symptoms and pupils interpersonal problems, as mentioned. MBI - emotional exhaustion: vindictive/ego centric: $r=.06$, n.s.; cold/distant: $r=.12$, n.s.; socially inhibited: $r=.10$, n.s.; MBI – personal fulfilment: vindictive/self-centred: $r=.09$, n.s.; cold/distant: $r=-.16$, n.s.; socially inhibited: $r=.01$, n.s.; MBI – depersonalisation: vindictive/ego centric: $r=.02$, n.s.; cold-distant: $r=.03$, n.s.; socially inhibited: $r=-.15$, n.s.; MBI – consternation: vindictive/ego centric: $r=.03$, n.s.; cold-distant: $r=-.01$; socially inhibited: $r=.02$; BSI - Global severity Index: vindictive/ego centric: $r=-.03$, n.s.; cold-distant: $r=.06$, n.s., socially inhibited: $r=-.06$, n.s.; FLZ – General life satisfaction: vindictive/ego centric: $r=-.06$, n.s., cold/distant: $r=-.11$; socially inhibited: $r=-.22$, n.s.). Pupils caring and warm behaviour shows significant negative correlations with teachers “Depersonalization” (overly accommodating: $r=-.27$, $p<.05^*$; self-sacrificing: $r=-.33$, $p<.01^{**}$; intrusive and demanding: $r=-.30$, $p<.05^*$) and the “Global Severity Index” (overly accommodating: $r=-.28$, $p<.05^*$; self-sacrificing: $r=-.29$, $p<.05^*$; overly accommodating: $r=-.26$, $p<.05^*$). Some significant negative correlation with pupils caring and warm behaviour, especially “self-sacrificing” ($r=-.26$; $p<.05^*$) and “intrusive and demanding” ($r=-.27$, $p<.05$), and also teachers “emotional exhaustion” is noted.

Discussion

This article shows a sample of results to a much broader investigation and in contrast to other investigations the subjects here don't give any signs of mental disorder. This again depends on what is defined as 'Burnout'. For example we assume that people with high-level emotional exhaustion leads to burnout, however this is not a sufficient criteria for a 'diagnosis'. Nowadays researchers consider burnout as a process and at the end of this process: effective disorders, anxiety disorders, interpersonal problems or an impairment of life satisfaction can arise (e.g. Burisch, 2011).

We have the hypothesis that pupil's interpersonal or disruptive behaviour offer a relationship and are in some way associated with teacher's process towards burnout and its impairment of life satisfaction. The given data shows that the pupils who show cold and distant behaviour are in fact not associated with teachers' symptoms however on the contrary pupils demonstrating a lack of caring warm (over-caring) behaviour are associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the symptom severity.

These finding are only possible suggestions towards a relationship between pupils' interpersonal problems and teachers' symptoms. We also have to take into account that the research findings were not confirm the hypothesis because there isn't sufficient teachers symptom variation, hence correlations were not significant. However pupils' interpersonal behaviour could become a significant predictor for burnout related symptoms.

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